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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170817779-8161-02]

RIN 0648-XG467

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Pacific cod by Catcher Vessels Less Than 60 Feet (18.3 Meters) Length Overall Using Hook-and-Line or Pot Gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters (m)) length overall (LOA) using hook-and-line or pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the 2018 Pacific cod total allowable catch allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 15, 2018, through 2400 hours, A.l.t., December 31, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the BSAI exclusive economic zone according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery

Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2018 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI is 8,748 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (83 FR 8365, February 27, 2018), and reallocations (83 FR 2932, January 22, 2018, 83 FR 42227, August 21, 2018, and 83 FR 56740, November 14, 2018).

In accordance with § 679.20(d)(1)(iii), the Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS (Regional Administrator), has determined that the 2018 Pacific cod TAC allocated as a directed fishing allowance to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI will soon be reached. Consequently, NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI. While this closure is effective the maximum retainable amounts at § 679.20(e) and (f) apply at any time during a trip.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the closure of directed fishing for Pacific cod by catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA

using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of December 13, 2018.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 14, 2018.

Karen H. Abrams,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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